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**Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Negotiators Announce
Public Comment Process**

USTR Zoellick Calls It An Important Opportunity for the Public to Provide Input

WASHINGTON- Representatives of the 34 Western Hemisphere nations working on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) are inviting comment from members of the public on the FTAA negotiations. Completion of the FTAA Agreement will create the world's largest free trade area, involving 34 countries with a combined population of 800 million people.

The comment process is a continuation of the unprecedented level of access the public has to the FTAA draft consolidated negotiating texts, and is an important step in the process of increasing the involvement of the public in trade negotiations.

Submissions are welcome on all aspects of the FTAA, including the preliminary consolidated draft texts of the Agreement, the ongoing FTAA negotiations, and the overall FTAA process.

The FTAA Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society is issuing its Third Open Invitation to submit comment. The Committee welcomes contributions on a continuous basis, and will forward submissions throughout the year to the FTAA negotiators in each country for their consideration. However, in order for submissions to be reflected in the Civil Society Committee's next Report to FTAA trade ministers for review at their meeting in Quito, Ecuador in October 2002, submissions must be received no later than May 1, 2002. Comments are welcome by e-mail, fax, courier, or postal mail to the addresses indicated in the Invitation. The Third Open Invitation for submission of comments is attached to this press release and also can be found on the USTR website (www.ustr.gov) and the official FTAA website (www.ftaa-alca.org).

When completed, the FTAA will help open Latin American and Caribbean markets to U.S. businesses

and farmers by eliminating barriers to trade, investment, and services, and by reducing tariffs which are much higher in these markets than those applied by the United States. It will create a single set of trade rules amongst 34 countries, which currently abide by a maze of rules. It will increase competition in the hemisphere and bring greater choice to U.S. consumers, thereby lowering costs for U.S. working families.

Background

The FTAA Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society is a non-negotiating FTAA entity, comprised of representatives of the 34 countries participating in the FTAA negotiations. The mission of the Civil Society Committee is to foster increasing and sustained communication with members of the public to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the development of the FTAA negotiating process. FTAA trade ministers endorsed the Civil Society Committee's work at their Buenos Aires meeting in April of this year, and instructed the Committee to take additional steps to involve the public in the FTAA process. Issuance of this Third Open Invitation, with more immediate circulation to the negotiators of the public's submissions, is only one step being taken by the Committee in response to this mandate.

The Civil Society Committee has issued two previous Open Invitations, in October 1998 and April 2000. Contributions in response to each Invitation were reflected in reports to the FTAA Trade Ministers. The reports can be found on the FTAA website. Additional information on the FTAA process, as well as the preliminary draft consolidated texts of the FTAA Agreement, can also be found on the USTR and FTAA websites.

On July 3, 2001 the preliminary draft consolidated texts of the FTAA Agreement were made public, a first for such a negotiating document. The preliminary draft texts reflect the different positions of the FTAA countries in each area of negotiations. The nine chapters have been drafted by negotiating groups on: market access; agriculture; investment; services; intellectual property rights; government procurement; subsidies, antidumping and countervailing duties; competition policy; and dispute settlement. USTR issued a Federal Register Notice on July 12, 2001 seeking public comment on the preliminary draft consolidated texts. Public comments received are available for review in the USTR Reading Room.

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